

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
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HGG-A-586

Chief, WHD

28 DEC 1953

Chief of Station, Guatemala

Biographic Data on Guatemalan Personalities

Juan Jose ~~AREVALO~~

Reference--(a) HGG-A-509
(b) HGG-A-519
(c) HGG-A-585

1. A review of the files reveals that Headquarters is in possession of pertinent data concerning the subject, and therefore, in view of other priority assignments, no attempt has been made by this station to correlate the information.
2. Attached is a list showing dispatches at Headquarters which this station considers pertinent and which have been broken down into various categories. There is also a large volume of correspondence, principally from [redacted], covering the period 1948-51 and dealing with Arevalo's probable involvement in Caribbean revolutionary activities.
3. Also attached is a copy of a confidential biographic data report on the subject prepared at this Embassy in September 1944 and giving certain basic data.

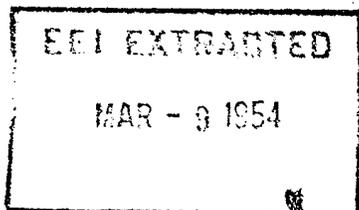
Adrian B. Kidwell

28 December 1953

Enclosures: as noted

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Post: Guatemala
Date: September 4, 1944

Name: Juan Jose AREVALO Bermejo
Nationality: Guatemalan
Title: Doctor of Philosophy and Sciences in Education
Date and place of birth: September 10, 1904. Taxisco, Santa Rosa, Guatemala
Party affiliations: No declaration. Supported by Frente Popular Libertador, Partido Renovacion Nacional and other smaller parties.
Previous career: Entirely in Education, mostly in Argentina. Normal school professor, founder of Instituto Pedagogico de San Luis, Argentina.
Languages spoken: Spanish, French.
Attitude toward and service in the U. S: No known service or travel in the United States. Attitude doubtful: professes profound admiration for the cause of the United Nations.
Family details: Son of Mariano Arevalo, farmer, and Elena Bermejo, teacher. Married to an Argentine of Spanish blood. Inevitably, there has been much speculation as to the background of his wife. She is an Argentine, born there of Spanish parents. Her father is one Silverio Martinez, her mother, Brigida Contreras de Martinez. Arevalo's wife, Elisa, is some four years older than he and was also a teacher.

Remarks:

Dr. Arevalo is possibly the most popular of Guatemala's current presidential candidates. His supporters include the extremely vociferous body of University students and a fair segment of the intelligent professional element, but definitely not the military group. His extreme popularity is something of a mystery in that he has never been active in politics and has never held an important office of any kind in Guatemala. As this report is written he has just arrived in Guatemala from Argentina, where he has lived with only brief interruptions since 1927.

Of ladino origin and Catholic faith, Arevalo was educated in the best Guatemalan schools, graduating from the Men's Normal School in 1922 and going immediately into public school teaching. His rise in the educational field was rapid. He traveled briefly in Holland, Belgium, Spain and France in 1926, completing in Europe his pedagogical study "Metodo Nacional." In 1927, under President Lazaro Chacon, Arevalo was awarded one of several foreign educational scholarships offered by the Government of Guatemala at that time. This took him to Argentina, where he won further scholastic distinction and received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and Science in Education from the Facultad de Humanidades de la Plata in 1934.

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Returning that same year to Guatemala, which in the meanwhile had settled down to its 13-year subservience to the Ubico dictatorship, Arevalo was disillusioned. The post given him in the Ministry of Education afforded little or no opportunity to put into effect his ideas of educational reform. Two years later he was back in Argentina, where he has lived since, occupying notable professional posts in pedagogy and founding the Pedagogical Institute of San Luis.

Conflicting reports make an accurate appraisal of Dr. Arevalo's political thought difficult. Due possibly to his long Argentine residence, he is accused by critics of Nazi sympathies. It has also been said he renounced his Guatemalan citizenship, but this is believed to have been disproved. Another story is that Arevalo wrote a pamphlet advocating two great Latin-American unions, one comprising the South American nations under the leadership of Argentina and the other including the Central American countries, led by Mexico -- the apparent intention being to break the lead of the United States in the Western Hemisphere.

On the other hand, a member of the American Embassy staff in Buenos Aires who is a personal friend of Arevalo considers the latter sincere in his lefty political principles. Reference is made in this connection to Despatch No. 15777 from the Embassy in Buenos Aires, in which Arevalo's declaration of political principles is enclosed. This document is violent in denunciation of Nazism, "European, Asiatic and American", and strong in praise of the United Nations. Liberal recognition is given of what the author terms Latin America's debt to the United States of America in World War II. Thanks to "our brothers, the Yankees", says the declaration, the Latin American nations need no longer worry about nazi-fascist predatory designs in this continent. But, it continues, there is still a great deal to be done to depose dictators in the Latin American countries.

Whether Dr. Arevalo means all this, or is merely playing up to the anti-dictator sentiment so popular in Guatemala since the fall of General Ubico, is currently a matter of interesting conjecture.

Prepared by: Wm. C. Affeld, Jr.
2nd Secretary of Embassy

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